No. 22 PRICE 5 CENTS

MY QUEEN

MARION MARLOWE IN OMAHA
OR HELD UP BY ACCIDENT
BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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Here Is Health

53 Leading St., Cleveland, O.,
Oct. 7, 1900.

Dr. T. A. SLOCUM.

Dear Sir:—I am pleased to inform you that your Remedies have completely cured me. I was troubled with weak lungs and chest, and also had catarrh. I *know* the Slocum System is the best in the world, and I will recommend your medicine to all who may be in need of Remedies of their character.

Yours truly,
HARRY L. LYON.

McComb, Pike Co., Miss.,
Oct. 2, 1900.

Dr. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—I write to let you know that your Remedies have entirely cured my little girl of scrofula and I feel very thankful to you for all your kindness.

Yours respectfully,
MALISIA ADISON.

Wesson, Copiah Co., Miss.,
Oct. 4, 1900.

DR. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—In reply to your kind letter I wish to say that since taking your Remedies I am sound as a dollar. I believe had it not been for your medicine I would now be in my grave. I feel very thankful to you for the cure that was performed in my case, and beg to remain,

Yours sincerely,
CHAS. VAN NORDEN.

Woodland, St. Joseph Co.,
Oct. 9, 1900.

Dr. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—My little boy had catarrh in the head very badly. When he was five years old I saw your medicine advertised and tried it and he now is entirely cured. I can highly recommend your medicine to anyone.

Yours respectfully,
MRS. ASA TABER.

Grove Park, Alachua Co., Fla.,
Oct. 19, 1900.

Dr. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—I received your letter, also the Remedies that you sent at my request and hope you will pardon my long delay in writing to you to recommend your good medicine. The pain in my breast has vanished and I am feeling a great deal stronger than before. I shall recommend your Remedies to all in my town who are suffering from consumption or any disorder of the throat, chest and lungs. Thanking you very kindly for what you have done for me, I remain,

Yours respectfully,
M. F. BOOKER.

Oran, Onondaga Co., N. Y.,
Sept. 5, 1900.

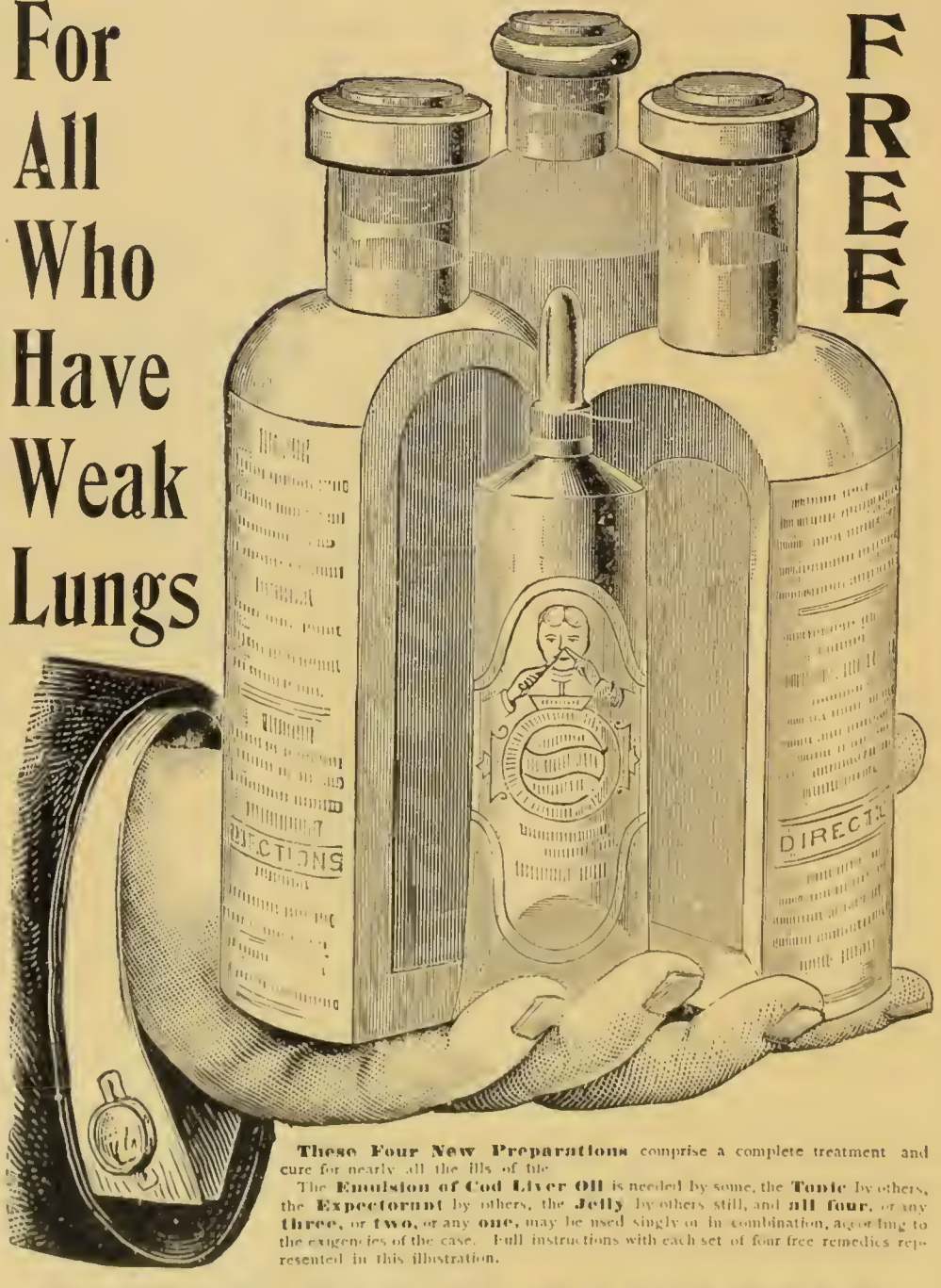
Dr. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—The cough which has troubled me so long is now entirely gone, and I owe my restoration to your wonderful Remedies. I am getting stronger every day, for which I feel very thankful to you, and shall recommend your Remedies to every body.

Yours respectfully,
CHAS. H. DARLING.

For All Who Have Weak Lungs

FREE



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MY QUEEN
A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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Marion Marlowe in Omaha;

OR,

HELD UP BY ACCIDENT.

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL.

"Oh, Bert! What in the world is the matter?"

Miss Ellis, the pretty *ingénue* of the Temple Theatrical Company, clutched the arm of her seat in the railroad car as she asked the question.

Bert Jackson, the young comedian of the company, stuck his head out of the window before her replied.

"Well, I'll be blowed! Talk about your wild and woolly West! Why, girls, will you believe it, we're held up by a flock of sheep! There's hundreds and thousands and millions of them!" he yelled, excitedly.

"Well, we did not need to stop quite so short, if there are! Couldn't they see them before they got to them? I nearly bumped my nose when the train came to a standstill," was the *ingénue's* answer, as she and her four companions looked eagerly from the windows.

"Oh, I do hope we didn't run into any of them! Aren't they lovely, especially the little lambs!" called out a charming voice, and Marion Marlowe turned to her next neighbor, enthusiastically.

"They be purty, no mistake," was the answer from the bluff old Westerner, whom Marion had addressed, "but we ranchers is used ter sech sights, my dear. Nebrasky is swarmin' with live stock of that thar description."

"Oh, I hope there are no bears or tigers or snakes," spoke up Miss Ellis, quickly.

Every one laughed at her anxiety, but the rough-looking fellow in the wide hat and buckskin trousers responded, good-naturedly:

"By live stock, I mean horses an' sheep an' cattle, my dear young lady. Thar may

be b'ars in Nebrasky, but ther res'dents of Omaha don't git nigh enuff ter git er bead on 'em."

"I'd like ter see one, you bet!" piped a shrill, boyish voice, and Jack Evans, or "Jackets," as he was usually called, suddenly put his head over the comedian's shoulder.

"Jackets" was a character that could not be overlooked. He was a new recruit, picked from the very gutters of St. Paul, and called by Marion the "mascot" of the company. It was through finding him that they had found Ida Inez, his mother, and the history of both their lives was one of the world's many tragedies.

The ranchman had taken a great fancy to the boy, and now, as he looked at him, he stroked a long, grizzled mustache that added greatly to his fierce appearance, while he smiled at the child with almost fatherly tenderness.

In fact, every member of the company interested the old fellow, and he had stayed with them persistently during the last day of their journey.

A more attractive group of young people he had never seen, and yet the buckskin-clad stranger admitted that he had been a great traveler.

Marion Marlowe, the star of the company, was a girl of rare beauty. Her hair was a rich chestnut hue, and rippled over her white forehead, while her gray eyes were luminous with courage and honor.

She was only a simple girl, but there was an unconscious grace about her, and every word from her lips showed that she was a thorough lady.

Mrs. Burnside, the "first old lady" of the cast, was a charming little woman, while Miss Alma Allyn, Marion's dearest friend, was as stylish as she was clever.

Little Ruby, the child actress, and Mr. Burnside's only baby, was a sweet, dainty little cherub, who won all hearts as a matter of course, and made herself as much at home on the knees of the other passengers as on her mother's. The soubrette and the *ingénue* were both bewitchingly pretty girls, and every man in the company seemed refined and gentlemanly.

While they were waiting for the sheep to cross the track, the ranchman had an opportunity to study them all a little closer.

Little Ruby was in her mother's lap, gazing delightedly at the sheep, but one hand was clasped warmly in Marion's. Altogether, they were a charming group, and decidedly out of the ordinary. They resembled a happily family much more than they did a theatrical company.

"We'll see big game, I hope, before we return from our tour," said Bert Jackson, taking his head in from the window and addressing the ranchman.

"We are to play in several cities that will give us a glimpse of wild country *en route*, and I'm just like 'Jackets' here—I'm longing to see bears, or any old beast that frequents the Rockies."

"I've seen 'em all, I reck'n," said the ranchman, smilingly, "an', powerful snakes! They ain't none on 'em no great sight when you get used ter 'em."

He smiled at Bert in his pleasant manner, and then, pulling an enormous roll of bills from his pocket, he proceeded to count them.

Bert stared at him a minute, and then glanced anxiously over the cars. There were three men on the opposite side of the car, and, as they caught sight of the ranchman's "roll," he saw them exchange glances. Bert tried to look innocent, but he was terribly worried then, as he glanced again at the stalwart form of the ranchman, he smiled at his own anxiety.

"Ain't it a bit dangerous to carry a 'roll' like that?" he asked, in a low tone. "I'd

been told that you have no end of highwaymen in this part of the country."

"No more'n yer hev in Noo York, laughed the Westerner, quickly. "I wuz jest a-seein' if I'd got it all. Had er dicker in Chicago over seven hundred head o' stock, an' I ain't much on figgers; p'raps yer kin help me."

Bert signified his willingness, and togethe they counted the bills, while the rest of the company still watched what was going on outside of the train, little Ruby clapping her hands in delight at each discovery of a lambkin.

"Now, tell me er little about yerself, young feller," said the ranchman, as he stowed the bills away in his capacious pockets.

"Yer don't mind my cooriosity, do yer? I'm old enuff ter be yer daddy."

"Not a bit! I'm delighted to tell you 'the ad, sad story of my life,'" said Bert, laughing. "I was born a pauper, sir. At the age of two hours I was an orphan, and, until my seventeenth year, I lived on a poor-farm."

"Great Injuns! Who'd er tho't it!" exclaimed the ranchman, leaning forward to stare at him.

Bert nodded his head, and then pointed to Marion.

"And I'd be there yet if it wasn't for her," he said, proudly. "She gave me the very last penny she had in the world, so I could run away and go to the city!"

Every member of the company stared at Bert's information, although two of them, at least, had heard of the incident.

"Yes, indeed," went on Bert, as he noted the stranger's interest. "Marion and I were companions in misery, in a way, when we were little. Of course, she had a home and a mother and father, but she wasn't happy, were you, Marion? Oh, I tell you, a person can't stifle the breath of ambition in his soul, and we were born to be famous, Marion and I! Nothing, not even stone walls, could bar our path to progress! We skipped them, yes, and the potato fields, too, and made a break for New York, and here we are!" he finished, dramatically.

"Oh, but you didn't leap the stone walls and land out here by a good deal!" broke in Alma Allyn, laughingly; "you have both been through a terrible lot, and Marion has encountered untold dangers!"

She put her hand on the young girl's shoulder and looked at her lovingly as she spoke, and just as the stranger was about to reply there was a sharp whistle from the engine.

"They're off!" shouted Orrin Olcott, the "villain" of the company, as he pulled his head in from the window.

"Now for an hour of brisk riding, and then, oh, ma—ha! ha!"

"There's one poor little lamb!" cried out Marion, suddenly, as she glanced from the window. "Oh, the poor little thing has been left behind! I do hope its mother or some one will come back for it!"

"Of course they will! Don't you know the sheep nature, Marion?" asked Bert, with a grin; "or have you become so cityfied that you've forgotten all such farmyard details?"

"I never forget anything about the country," said the girl, quickly. "I love the country, Bert—you know I do! Sometimes I wonder if I will ever go back to it!"

"Would yer give up yer ambition an' settle on er farm?" asked the ranchman, quickly: "I mean, if ther farm wuz so big yer wouldn't want fer nothin'?"

There was a moment of astonishment at the surprising question, and two gentlemen, who were sitting several seats behind, suddenly stopped talking to wink at each other, and then both listened eagerly. The picturesque old ranchman was gazing straight at Marion now, and there was a look upon [illegible] face that held them spellbound

A deep red flush mounted to the young girl's brow, yet, with wonderful dignity, she answered his question.

"I would not object to life upon a farm if it were my destiny, sir," she said, simply; "but at present I feel that I should fill another sphere. I think I am needed in the city far more than in the country, and I am far from the place that I long to fill in my present vocation. I have many rungs of the ladder to climb before I can rest at its top."

The ranchman leaned back in his seat, and his manner grew calmer.

"I'm er lookin' fer a wife, Miss Marlowe," he said, quietly, after a minute. "I reckon now I've got ther finest ranch in Arizony, an' there's boodle besides ter keep it er goin'. Every one in Omaha knows me, an' I might say every one in ther State of Nebrasky. I'm er rough rancher, an' I've got faults, not er doubt erbout it; but I'd be as good ter er wife as if she wuz an angel. Now, pr'aps if yer knowed me better, I'd stand er chance, Miss Marlowe—so I'd jest ask ye right hyar if I kin call on yer in ther city. Thet thar's er fa'r an' squar' poppin' of ther question, accordin' to my notion. I'm askin' ye afore yer friends, so's thar'll be no misunderstandin'."

If a thunderbolt had fallen in the car the astonishment could not have been greater.

The ranchman's voice was so deep that it sounded almost like a bellow, and every passenger in the car had heard his question. There was not a trace of discourtesy or jest upon the sun-browned face. He was as sincere as he was candid, while he waited for the girl's answer.

CHAPTER II.

A COLLISION.

But the beautiful star's answer was postponed indefinitely. She was just opening her lips, when there came a fearful crash, then another, and another, and then all was confusion.

"A collision! Hold on, girls!"

Bert Jackson yelled the words, but they came too late—the car had toppled over.

The din and roar of crashing glass and splintering timbers was in their ears; then frantic shrieks and cries seemed emanating from all directions.

Dr. Reginald Brookes, who was traveling with the company as "leading man" during an extended vacation, was the first to extricate himself from the frightful wreck that surrounded them.

There was but one thought in his mind, and that was to save Marion. But where was she? In the struggling mass of humanity and wreckage he could not get a glimpse of her.

A suspicious darkness seemed filling the car. As the doctor balanced himself firmly upon the end of a seat he could see great clouds of smoke and steam roaring rapidly toward him.

"Quick! Smash in that window, doc! I've got somebody!" yelled Bert Jackson, and the next instant the crash of glass overhead showed that he was filling his own orders. In some way—no one ever knew just how—Bert drew himself up through the broken window. The car was lying on its side. He was in a place of safety.

But not for a minute had he lost his hold on the clothing of Miss Ellis, who he had grasped in the first moment of horror, and the next minute Dr. Brookes was aiding him to drag her through the window.

As the young girl reached safety, the doctor looked again for Marion; but Mrs. Burnside was reaching up to him from under a pile of wreckage, and, with Bert's help, she, too, was lifted to safety.

"My baby! Save my baby!"

It was a mother's cry.

Dr. Brookes groaned in despair. He could see nothing of little Ruby.

Everything was confusion outside the car. Inside, the shrieks and groans were increasing, but the doctor worked on furiously.

"Look out, young feller! Thet thar's tew heavy fer you! Let me git er holt of it!" called a bluff voice, suddenly.

The doctor was dragging at a heavy stick of timber; the next minute the ranchman had lifted it easily and tossed it to a place where its weight could do no damage.

The next move of the brave old giant was to pick Orrin Olcott up bodily. He was apparently unconscious as they passed him up through the window.

Dr. Brookes worked on with the ranchman beside him.

They tore cushions and splintered timbers aside until they came at length upon Mr. Temple, the manager of the company, who was unharmed, but had been pinned down by a stick of timber.

"Thank God! Now I can do something!" were the manager's first words; then he, too, began pulling at the wreckage that was all about them.

Miss Allyn and Ida Inez, the soubrette, were passed up next; still there was not so much as a sign of Marion.

The crash of glass was frequent now, and other passengers in the car were making their exit through the windows or working like heroes to save the injured.

"Here she is! Help, doc!" cried Mr. Temple, suddenly. He had caught sight of Marion wedged in between the seats, with a great mass of cushions and broken glass on top of her.

"She has little Ruby in her arms!" cried the doctor, as he dragged off the last cushion. "I might have known that she would have the child! It is just like our Marion!"

There was a sob in his voice, but his arms felt like a giant's. Passing little Ruby up to Mr. Temple, he bent and raised the young girl bodily.

With an eagerness that was agony itself, he strained her to his bosom. There was not a sign of life; her body was limp and motionless.

Whether all were saved, he did not know; not for one second would he lay down his precious burden.

The smoke and steam had enveloped him now, and in the chaos in the car it was almost impossible to gain a footing.

The passengers who were struggling to their feet jostled against him at every step, and the weight of the young girl in his arms was beginning to tell upon him.

Some one peered into his face. It was Mr. Temple. He was bracing himself upon the splintered arm of a seat, which was directly below the shattered window.

"I'll go up first!" he cried, as he dragged himself up with a little help from Bert; then the two who were outside bent over and reached their arms down for Marion.

But it was a man's head that protruded through the window.

Bert caught a glimpse of his face and then drew back.

What had become of the doctor and Marion?

Mr. Temple grasped the man's shoulders and gave him a terrific jerk. He was angry and indignant that he should have crowded through the opening when an unconscious woman was waiting to be rescued.

As the man dropped swiftly from the car Bert recognized his face. He was one of the three who had been eyeing the ranchman's money. The next moment both he and Mr. Temple were peering down into the car.

They were just in time to hear a tremendous oath, and then the big Westerner, who was just below them, sent out one of his fists fiercely.

Some one, they could not see who, went down in the *débris* of the car. The next minute Marion was passed up through the window—but was it to safety?

Dr. Brookes followed speedily, and again took her in his arms. His face was as white as death, and one of his hands was cut and bleeding.

"What was it?" asked Bert, as they reached the ground; "the trouble in the car, I mean?" he added, excitedly.

The doctor's blue eyes flashed with indignation as he answered briefly:

"Some one tried to rob the ranchman while he was working like a hero! Can you imagine such a cur? But wait! It's the ranchman's turn next! He hit him once; the second time he will kill him!"

CHAPTER III.

BRAVERY.

Such a scene as they witnessed after they had laid Marion upon a bed formed of the coats of her three devoted companions!

The spot was a lonely one—there was not a habitation in sight; and the immediate vicinity of the two wrecked trains looked almost like a battlefield.

The two engines had crashed into each other, but, fortunately, the second belonged to a freight train, so the absence of more passengers took a little from the horror.

For one hundred yards or more people were lying on the ground, or crawling about nursing minor injuries.

Some lay cold in death, with weeping friends about them, while others were in the agonies of death with none to succor them.

Miss Allyn crawled over to Marion as best she could. Both of her ankles were injured, but she had not uttered a murmur.

The hoarse shouts of the trainmen mingled with the plaintive cries of the sufferers, and from the wreck of the two trains that had collided a thick, black smoke was rising.

Marion lay as still as death. There was no pulse perceptible, yet the young physician worked on with the agony of despair in every effort.

At last she breathed, and hope sprang into his heart. He could bear anything, now that he knew Marion was living.

"Where is the ranchman?"

It was Bert who asked the question as every member of the company was clustered about Marion.

Mrs. Burnside raised her face from over her fast-reviving child and listened for the answer with a mournful eagerness.

"I left him inside. He was working like a hero. There were others to be rescued," was the doctor's answer.

"Every one has worked nobly," said a solemn voice. "Can I do anything for you here?"

Bert looked up and saw the white face of the conductor.

"No, thanks; we're all right. Is every one out?" asked Bert, starting up. "I have been so anxious about Marion that I have forgotten the others."

"How many are there in your party?" was the conductor's reply.

Mr. Temple turned from chafing Marion's hand, and answered, promptly:

"Eleven in the sleeper 'Ardath,' and three in the 'smoker.'"

"Then you are all right," was the quick reply; "and your three men in the 'smoker' are each of them heroes. There's only three cowards on the train, thank Heaven!"

He hurried on to the next group, but Bert ran after him. He was just in time to help save two children.

"I think that is all now," he heard some one say. It was a familiar voice. He turned and saw Bob Hinton, the calcium man of the company.

"Is every one safe, Bert?"

The comedian could not answer. He laid the child that he was carrying down upon its mother's lap; then turned and went back to look again at Marion.

Suppose she should die?

As Bert asked himself the question his mind turned involuntarily to Miss Ellis, and he caught himself wondering what his feelings would have been if Miss Ellis had been badly injured.

For the first time he realized that he would have felt it more than he cared to say, and he turned in Miss Ellis' direction, intending to speak to her.

"She is reviving, thank Heaven!"

It was the doctor's voice.

Bert turned away to hide his tears, but there was no place there to turn for solitude. Bright tongues of flame were darting from the splintered coaches now, and the ground for yards around was a veritable hospital.

There was only one thing to do—that was to make himself useful. He took a swift glance over the scene to see where he was most needed; then dashed over to where he saw a man lying, apparently wounded and neglected.

As he gazed down into his face, he recognized him at once. It was one of the three men of whom he had suspicions.

But the fellow was bleeding profusely from a severe scalp wound now, and Bert did not falter in his humane efforts. He took a handkerchief from his own pocket and bound up the wound; then ran to one of the trainmen whom he saw had a pail of water.

"Time enough to settle with him later," he muttered to himself; "I'll give him a drink, and then go on to the others."

Orrin Olcott had revived from a simple faint, and Miss Ellis was sitting up, bandaging a sprained wrist as best she could, so that she could be ready later to do her share of nursing.

As Bert passed her on his rounds among the injured ones, he stopped and fastened the bandage; then bent and kissed her injured hand tenderly.

"Sit still a minute and rest, dear," he said, in a low voice. "There's nothing you can do. We haven't any more bandages."

In an instant, the young girl drew off a white skirt, and the two tore it into strips; then Bert went back to his duties.

After that Miss Ellis recovered rapidly. She had made a discovery that filled her heart with joy—Bert Jackson, the youth whom she adored, was really and truly in love with her.

Ten feet from Miss Ellis, Bert came upon Mr. Temple. He had just succeeded in making the soubrette, with her badly sprained arm and two lacerated fingers as comfortable as possible.

Ida Inez smiled at him cheerfully, but that was all she could do, besides keeping her eye and hand on her badly frightened youngster.

A new danger crept upon the scene as the cars began to catch afire, and the fear of an explosion added greatly to the horror.

As Bert worked, shoulder to shoulder with the other male passengers and the trainmen, he was constantly on the lookout for the jovial ranchman.

Where was he?

It was a question that no one could answer.

The sleeper "Ardath" was ablaze and burning like tinder.

As they were carrying her back to a place of safety, Marion suddenly opened her eyes and stared about her.

There was just one brief instant of dazed bewilderment; then the blood rushed to her white cheeks and her hand clutched the doctor's.

"What is it? What has happened? Oh, I see! The train is wrecked. Put me down this minute! I must go to the rescue!"

The words came sharply from the brave girl's lips. She even struggled a little to free herself from the arms that were enfolding her.

"Just a minute, Marion! You'll be ready to go in a minute," said the doctor, soothingly. Then Miss Allyn crept up and put her hand on her friend's shoulder.

"Wait a little, Marion," she began; but the young girl interrupted her.

"Quick, Alma, we must help them! Oh, are you hurt, Alma?" she cried, wildly. "To think that I should be here while people are suffering—perhaps dying."

She staggered to her feet with the doctor's arm around her.

The next moment, with a sigh of utter weakness, her head sank upon his shoulder.

"She is safe! Now I can help the rest!"

Dr. Brookes was almost smiling as he laid Marion down, this time upon a blanket that some one had brought for her.

Ida Inez and Miss Allyn seated themselves at her side, one with a bottle of smelling salts, and the other with some brandy, while Mrs. Burnside, with Ruby in her arms, crept to the side of Miss Ellis, who had an arm injured.

"It is only a faint this time," went on the physician, cheerily. "She'll come out of it in a minute, and I know what her first words will be. I am going to aid the others before Marion sends me!"

CHAPTER IV.

MARION'S LONGING.

It seemed an eternity before all the horror was over; then the relief train that came rushing from Omaha made a decided improvement in the situation.

Dr. Brookes had been working like a beaver, bandaging wounds and reducing fractures, and in the midst of his work he found Marion beside him.

"Mrs. Burnside and I can help," she said, very calmly. "Miss Ellis and Alma are too ill; but they will take care of Ruby, and dear little 'Jackets' is looking after his mother."

The doctor glanced at her face. It was white but resolute. He knew instinctively that there was no use to oppose her.

When they were all aboard of the relief train, the brave girl still worked on. There were temples to be bathed and hysterical women to be calmed, and, although the train was well equipped with physicians and supplies, there was a shortage of nurses that made her services much needed.

Bert looked over the train carefully. The ranchman was not there, and only one of the trio of suspicious-looking fellows.

But there was no time to waste now in guessing his whereabouts.

He could only make what inquiries were possible, and tell the train officials what he knew—the rest of the time was spent in ministering to others.

They were all in their rooms at the Paxton Hotel before any one thought again of the ranchman: then Marion suddenly spoke of her candid admirer.

"Oh, I do hope we shall see him again, Alma," she said, gravely. "I am sure he was honest and manly in his sentiments. Poor old fellow! If he could only find some good woman to love him!"

"I wonder who he is?" was Miss Allyn's reply, as she moved one of her neatly bandaged ankles cautiously. She was lying on a couch in one corner of the room.

"That is so! We did not think to ask his name!" exclaimed Miss Ellis, who was lying on another couch, out of sight of Miss Allyn. "But, then, he knows who we are, and he assured me that he would be at the theatre. I should be awfully disappointed if he did not keep his promise."

"He'll come, if he is alive!" spoke up Miss

Allyn, quickly. "If I read the old fellow right, he is the soul of honor. I haven't a doubt that he would make an adorable husband."

"Oh, Alma, suppose he has been killed!" cried Marion, springing up. "Why, don't you remember, the doctor was the last to see him, and he was then inside the car! After that the train caught fire—and, oh, what do you suppose became of him?"

She was pale with consternation as the thought flashed into her mind. He was such a bluff old fellow, she could not help liking him.

"We must tell Bert to look him up," said Miss Allyn, thoughtfully. "You know he said that every one in Omaha knew him. I fancy a description will be all that is needed, and that is easily given."

"I should describe him as 'picturesque,'" murmured Miss Ellis, softly. "He was so handsome in his buckskins and that wide sombrero."

"A typical ranchman, I fancy," was Miss Allyn's answer; "an 'unpolished diamond,' as the poets would say; or, better yet, 'one of nature's noblemen.'"

"If he is all that, Alma, we certainly must not lose sight of him," said Marion, smiling. "Oh, what a pity it is that there is no one in the company to marry him! I am out of the matrimonial question myself, and so are you, Alma, and so is Miss Ellis, but——"

"Hold on, Marion! How am I out of it?" asked Miss Ellis, eagerly.

Marion winked at her chum before she replied, and there was a mischievous smile curving her pretty features.

"Why, I supposed you and Bert had things all settled by this time," she said, demurely. "If I am wrong, pray forgive me—and, oh, Miss Ellis, do take my advice, and marry the ranchman! It will pay Bert up beautifully for being so tardy!"

Miss Ellis laughed, but there was a flush upon her cheeks. She was beginning to think with Marion—that Bert was a little "tardy."

"Pshaw! He don't care a straw for me—that boy!" she tried to say, lightly. "He makes desperate love one day, and forgets all about it the next; still, as he always comes back, I can't exactly call him fickle."

"I should say not!" cried Marion, with just a trace of resentment. "Bert isn't fickle a bit. He is just testing your devotion."

"Well, he's tried it pretty thoroughly, and it hasn't been found wanting yet," snapped the *ingénue*. "Why, just think how he has flirted with every soubrette in the company! He's kept me on the 'anxious seat' ever since I first met him!"

"He deserves a scolding, and he shall get it," said Marion, gayly; "but here he comes now. Shall I administer it this minute?"

"Oh, Marion, don't! For heaven's sake, don't!" cried Miss Ellis, blushing. "Why, I wouldn't even let him know that I was thinking about him! If he should ever hear what I said, he'd be sure to get conceited."

"No, he wouldn't! He'd just love you a thousand times more! I know that boy's nature!" whispered Marion, stoutly.

"How are the invalids?" called Bert, who had been tapping gently on the door. "Everybody on deck in this quarter, Marion?"

"I can answer for myself," said Miss Allyn, as he entered. "I'm slightly mutilated, but still in the ring, and I guess Miss Ellis is in about the same condition."

Bert's lips were smiling, but there was an anxious look in his eyes as he walked over to the sofa and sat down by Miss Ellis.

Marion discreetly turned her back and went over to Miss Allyn.

"I'm going in to see Ida now," she said, softly, in her ear. "You make believe go to sleep, so you will not embarrass the lovers,

while I go and make the rounds of the other invalids."

"Oh, Marion, I wish I could go, too, but I m absolutely useless," sighed Miss Allyn. "I don't mind the pain, but I do hate this being cooped up! I want to be doing something, the same as you!"

"It is lovely to think I was not crippled," said the young girl, gratefully; "still, the doctor says I came near dying, and I know how you all felt. It made me cry when he tried to describe how you all suffered."

"Don't speak of it, darling! I'll never forget it," was the quick answer. "If we had lost you, I am sure I don't know what would have happened; but go on, dear, and see how the others are faring; and, oh, Marion, don't forget to find out about the ranchman! It will break my heart if anything serious has happened to the fine old fellow!"

Marion left the room silently and without glancing back, but she knew instinctively that Miss Ellis was on the "anxious seat" no longer. Bert was too quiet for that, and, besides, there was something else. She had just closed the door behind her when she heard the sound of kisses.

"Oh, I am so glad that he loves her!" she murmured, as she heard it. "The dear girl loves him so deeply, and now she is happy! Oh, will I ever, ever know the bliss of such love? It must be perfectly heavenly to be adored by a handsome lover—one whose every glance thrills your heart with ecstasy!"

She stopped short with a blush that crimsoned her very temples. In her impulsive joy she had whispered the words aloud, and Dr. Brookes was right before her—he had heard every syllable.

CHAPTER V.

THE REFORMATION OF "JACKETS."

The corridor where they stood was screened by curtains, and as their eyes met the young physician stepped forward eagerly.

"Marion, darling! You do long for love, then!" he whispered, passionately. "You are not cold and unresponsive, but warm and ardent! Oh, that I might be the prince to awaken you from your slumber! I would be the happiest man in the world, Marion!"

The tears were in the noble girl's eyes as she answered him, and her graceful head drooped sadly upon her bosom.

"I do long for love, Dr. Brookes," she said, softly; "I am too honest to deny that I think it would be heavenly! But it is also true that my slumber seems deathlike! In spite of all the noble princes who have come, it cannot be broken! Some day, when I am older, perhaps I shall awake, but at present I must dream on and take what pleasure I can from my dreaming! It is not my lot to experience the great bliss of loving very early in life, I guess; but perhaps it will be sweeter if I am forced to await it."

"I hope so, Marion."

The words were said soberly.

Dr. Brookes had recovered himself and was gazing at her earnestly.

"I trust that when it comes, it will fulfill all your expectations! I hope the illusion or delusion will remain until the end, and that nothing will ever occur to rob it of its sweet glamour, or destroy the poetry and romance which is the essence of all affection! When your heart's awakening does come, Marion, will you let me know?"

Marion bent her head. There were tears in her eyes. She could not answer the noble words except by a gesture. A moment later she had passed him and was on her way to Ida Inez, the new soubrette, as she was called in the company. At the door she was obliged to wait until she had calmed herself a little.

"Why could she not love him?"

It was the old, old question. Marion reproached herself bitterly for her hopeless obstinacy.

The voice of "Jackets'" mother, bidding her enter, brought her back to her senses, and with a heroic effort the young girl brought a smile to her features.

"I am almost well," were the soubrette's first words. "'Jackets' has taken good care of me. Why, he is almost as good as the doctor! I am really proud of my baby, Miss Marlowe."

Marion sat down by her side in the chair that "Jackets" had vacated, and as the boy slipped to the farther end of the room, she looked after him tenderly.

"He is going to grow up a noble man, Ida," she said, brightly. "Your boy's evil days are passed, and now he is going to be a brave, kind gentleman. But how are you, really, dear? Is the arm getting better?"

Ida Inez lifted her right arm to demonstrate the truth of her words.

"It will be well by to-morrow night—I am sure of it," she said, gayly; "so, you see, I will be all ready for the first performance."

"We all of us will—all but Alma," was the answer; "but Mr. Temple has arranged for Miss Ellis to 'double up.' You know, the *ingénue's* part in this play amounts to very little."

"It will be my baby's *début*," said Ida, laughing. "I do hope he'll be as famous some day as little Ruby."

"Don't want ter be famous! I'd ruther be rich!" came from the lips of "Jackets," as he sidled over a little nearer to Marion.

"I'se kin do de ack all right, an' don't youse fergit it; but de t'ing is here: Do I'se want ter rooin' me repertation? I'se er sport, I is, an' dat's de t'ing dat goes in dis bloomin' country! W'y, dere wuzn't er light-fingered gent in St. Paul wot c'u'd do me! Dis kid c'u'd give de hull push cards an' spoids an' den lick 'em out er sight! Now, wot does dis jay acktin' 'mount ter 'side er dat ockerpashun?"

"Oh, Jack!"

His mother cried out the words in a tone of horror. Would she never be able to reform her incorrigible offspring?

"Don't scold him, dear," said Marion, sweetly; then she put a gentle hand on the strange child's shoulder.

"So you would rather be a bad, wicked thief than a gentleman?" she said, very softly. "You would rather be a criminal, stealing what does not belong to you, than to be an honorable man that every one respects and looks up to? Why, 'Jackets,' if I were a boy, I should want to have people love me! I should want them to trust me, and know that I was honest! Do you ever think, 'Jackets,' what a bad man Dan Hobart was—the man who taught you to steal, and who is now in prison? All criminals are caught sooner or later, 'Jackets.' Then away they go to jail, or perhaps to the gallows."

There was no reply for a minute after the young girl spoke, and then "Jackets" looked up at her with a curious expression.

"Don't youse want me ter crib t'ings, Miss Marlowe?" he asked, slyly. "If youse don't, I'll quit; dat's de sollum trut'! It'll be orful hard, but youse is de only peach in de orchid! If I give youse my woid, I'll stick ter it like glue! Dis kid don't never go back on er loidy!"

Ida Inez held her breath, but Marion answered delightedly:

"Will you really promise me never to steal any more?" she asked, quickly. "Oh, 'Jackets,' if you will, I will love you dearly!"

"Dat settles it! De game is chucked! Vallybles an' boodle is safe in dis town, Miss Marler! I'se wouldn't pinch er jooel if I'se fell over it on de poivements! Dat's de trut', Miss Marler! Youse kin gamble on it!"

Marion caught him up in her arms and gave him a kiss. He was a clean boy now, thanks to his altered habits. When she first

beheld him in St. Paul he was anything but kissable.

"Now, go over and kiss your mother," she said, coaxingly; "and make her the promise, too, just because she loves you, too, 'Jackets.'"

The boy went obediently and kissed his mother's cheek, then he turned like a flash and darted out of the apartment.

"Stop him! Stop him, quick, Miss Marlowe!" cried the poor mother, sharply. "He'll go straight and steal something, you see if he don't! I can't help saying so, Miss Marlowe; so please don't blame me! I know him so well! He is as treacherous as his father!"

Marion half rose from her chair and then sat down again.

"I shall trust him," she said, quietly. "I don't believe he will steal. I am sure he ran away because he thought of something!"

The eager voice of "Jackets" fell upon their ears almost before she finished. He was talking in his shrill voice to some one out in the corridor.

"Yep! She's in dere, boss!" they heard him say, distinctly. "Miss Marler is in dat room, a visitin' my mudder! If yer wants ter see her, boss, I'll go in an' git her."

Marion strained her ears to catch the reply. It came in the bluff bellow of the picturesque ranchman.

"Go in and trot her out, boy," he said, in his jovial way. "No, you needn't to, neither! I'll jest chase myself down ter ther office. It's a dern fired noosance ter send up yer name, but it's ther proper caper in these hyar newfangled hostelries, an' ef I am er ranchman, I ain't no hayseed!"

Marion needed nothing more. She dashed out into the hall.

But she was a moment too late. "Jackets" stood alone, grinning, while the top of the ranchman's sombrero was just disappearing down the elevator.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AUDIENCE OF ONE.

Marion hurried from room to room, telling the good news to the company. The ranchman was safe, and they were all delighted.

Then she ran back to her own room to be ready for the card, or whatever message the bluff old fellow sent up to her.

Would he really ask her to be his wife?

The question was beginning to distress her a little.

He was so brave, so noble! She could not help admiring him. Then she just longed to see a ranch—such a one as this man was the owner of.

"I expect it is big and roomy and wholesome and complete, just like himself," she whispered to herself. "How I would like to see it, but not as his wife! No, no! I must not think of that! It would be ridiculous!"

"Marion, dear, may I come in?"

It was Bert who asked the question. In an instant, the young girl had admitted him, and they were chatting about the ranchman.

"He is a grand fellow," said Bert, enthusiastically. "I just saw him in the office. He was just coming up when somebody spoke to him—one of the richest men in Omaha, I believe—and they are now talking 'horses.'"

"Then he is not likely to call just yet," said Marion, laughing; "for I would imagine the horse question would absorb him completely."

"Oh, I guess he'll come all right," began Bert, when Mr. Temple stood at the door. He had found it necessary to call a rehearsal.

"We'll have it right here in your room," he added, as he walked away. "Then all our injured ones can be moved in easily; and, if it is possible, we'll give a performance tomorrow evening."

Marion nodded her head. She felt sure that it could be done, and she was growing a

little anxious over the loss of two performances.

"The public shall be repaid for their waiting, if we can possibly repay it," she said, stoutly. "I shall act my very best, I can assure you, to-morrow evening."

"And your 'best' has yet to be beaten," said Bert, admiringly. "Well, I'm sorry for the ranchman, for now his call will have to wait until after the rehearsal."

"Oh, Bert!" cried Marion, as he was leaving the room, "have you heard any more about those rascally fellows—the ones who tried to rob the ranchman while he was saving lives yesterday?"

Bert stepped back into the room and lowered his voice.

"The whole outfit is in Omaha, and the police are 'on to' them. They are just waiting for an excuse to pounce on the dastards!"

Marion turned back and began arranging the furniture of the room, so that there should be an open space in which to do their rehearsing of the "business."

She entered heart and soul into her work, for she was passionately fond of the stage, and was ambitious to equal or excel the great artists.

She was too modest to realize how near an artist she was now, or to appreciate how genuinely the public applauded her talents.

The news of the good work of the members of the company during the accident had been spread all over the city, and every one was anxious to see the beautiful young woman and the brave, handsome doctor.

Little Ruby and "Jackets" had both been mentioned in the papers, and the fact that "Jackets" had but recently been a newsboy on the streets of St. Paul had served to awaken a great deal of interest. Then the facts of his parentage were brought to light, and the tragedy of the flour mill, where he had been so nearly murdered by his own father, thrilled the whole city of Omaha with a curiosity to see him.

Marion Marlowe had saved him at the very last minute, and, perhaps, this was one reason why he had made her his promise. He had learned to love the beautiful girl, and was anxious to please her. As for his mother, her sad history was the talk of the town, and, although this was not the kind of advertising that Mr. Temple desired, still, he was enough of a business man to take advantage of it.

"It's an awfully funny rehearsal, but we stage people are accustomed to funny things," laughed Miss Ellis, as she came in, leaning on Bert's shoulder. She was looking radiantly happy, in spite of the pain of her many bruises, and both Marion and Alma gave her sympathetic glances.

"I'm sorry to delay the ranchman's call," remarked Mr. Temple, when Marion told him. "He's a noble fellow, without a doubt. I hope to cultivate his acquaintance later."

"Oh, we'll go and see him often after he has married Marion and they have settled down on that farm," laughed Bert. "When is the happy day, Marion, or isn't it decided?"

Miss Ellis pulled his ear sharply to make him stop teasing, but Marion only smiled in a tantalizing manner.

"It may not be a joke, after all," she said, pleasantly. "Who knows but that I will really marry him? He is very nice, indeed—and stranger things have happened."

The doctor looked at her sharply, and then smiled complacently. He evidently thought there was not much danger of her marrying the ranchman.

"Is every one ready?" asked Mr. Deering, the stage-manager, as he entered, with a lot of manuscript in his hands.

"We have a splendid advance sale. It will be a case of 'standing room only.' Now, what shape are we in to give a performance?"

"I'm all right," laughed Marion, "but I

am only one. I wish I could say as much for the others."

"You are the whole show, Marion," spoke up Bert, gallantly. "The public wouldn't miss the rest of us if you supplied our places with dummies!"

"Well, I like that, Bert Jackson!" cried Miss Allyn, laughingly. "Why, if I wasn't to appear in that second act, the curtain would have to be rung down, and you know it as well as I do."

"Yes, the audience would all wish to retire to give thanks," murmured Bert, unabashed. "They'd come back again as soon as they had relieved their feelings."

"Just wait until I can walk, and I'll pay you for that," laughed Alma. "But really, Mr. Deering, I would like to run over my part. I am a little shaky on the dialogue, but I guess I have the 'business' down fine, until the entrance of——"

She was obliged to stop suddenly, for some one was fairly pounding on the door.

"The picturesque ranchman!" muttered Miss Ellis, finishing out the sentence.

"Beg yer pardon fer intrudin'," said the jovial voice, "but I wuz told in ther office that you wuz a-holdin' er rehearsal. Now, I'm a stranger ter play actin', but I'm all-fired coorus, an' if it won't be askin' tew much, I'd like ter be ther audiunce."

CHAPTER VII.

JEALOUSY.

No such thing entered Mr. Temple's head as to refuse the request; on the contrary, he was overjoyed to see the old fellow.

Such a traveling companion as this was not easily forgotten, and, besides, they were all anxious to know how he had effected his escape from the burning car, in which they had last seen him.

The old fellow chuckled, but he would not tell just then.

He declared that his "yarn" would keep, and he wanted to see that rehearsal.

After the hand-shaking was over, the rehearsal began, with the ranchman looking on in absolute wonder.

Miss Allyn spoke her lines, and then Miss Ellis repeated them, as it was more than probable that she would have to play the part, unless the injured ankles were much improved by the next evening.

"Jackets" did a small part creditably, much to his mother's delight, and then little Ruby lisped her baby lines so daintily that the old fellow was charmed and insisted upon her sitting upon his knee immediately after.

It was a jolly affair, and there was great joking and laughter.

The presence of their strange friend, alive and well, had put them all in a merry humor.

Then there was an undercurrent of mischief running through it all, for had not the old ranchman avowed his intention of courting Marion?

He watched her with an expression of open admiration upon his features, even while he took an active interest in the doings and sayings of the others.

Then Marion and the doctor attempted to run over a scene together, but, before the tender passages were half spoken, there was a roar from the ranchman's corner that almost shook the ceiling.

"Hold on, thar, mister!" he cried out, as he glared at the doctor. "Be you two engaged or married, or what? Dashed if I like thet thar sort er thing; but ef you two air engaged, why thet settles ther hull biz! I'll jest pick up stakes an' get back ter Arizony."

"They are merely playing a role, don't you understand?" said Mr. Temple, good naturedly. "I can assure you, sir, they are not engaged, but all actors and actresses have to play love parts occasionally."

"I reck'n thet's so," said the ranchman,

falling back into his chair. "I reck'n it's all right, but it ain't ter my likin'."

The others smiled, but Marion blushed painfully.

The picturesque ranchman was becoming embarrassing.

The love scenes were cut short after that, and only the minor parts rehearsed, and before it was all over the old fellow had grown quite amiable.

"Now, then, mister—what's your name—I've got er invite fer yer," he said, jovially. "I want ther hull kit an' boodle of yer ter come fer a sleighride. I've got er couple o' dozen or so of horses right here in Omyha, and yer kin hev yer pick of ther teams—ennything thet suits yer."

Mr. Temple thanked him. There was no use declining. It would only have hurt the old fellow's feelings. It was a beautiful day for a drive, and, although the weather was mild, the snow was still in excellent condition.

"I'll hev er lot er rigs at ther door in er shake," he went on; "an' all I want is ther honor of drivin' Miss Marler. I've got er pair of mustangs thet kin make ther snow fly, I tells yer. Thar ain't nothin' in this part of ther country thet kin touch 'em."

Here was a dilemma for Marion, but she knew they were all looking at her, and, half in the spirit of mischief, she turned to the old fellow.

"I shall be delighted to ride behind your mustangs, sir," she said, very sweetly; "and it is very kind, indeed, for you to give us the invitation."

"Then thet thar's settled! I'm er goin' fer ther hosses," said the old fellow, starting. "Great snakes! but won't them ponies be tickled when they see her! They arter go like blazes with thet thar girl behind 'em!"

There was a general laugh as the old fellow went out, but Marion was still able to do her share of the teasing.

"He grows more charming every minute," she said, with a gay look at Miss Allyn. "Really, Alma, I think you are right—he would make some woman an adorable husband!"

"Wait until after you see the mustangs," was Bert's laughing suggestion. "If they are lean and lanky, look out for him, Marion; but if they look sleek and well fed, it may be safe to marry him!"

"He's a jealous old chap," spoke up Miss Ellis, quickly. "Why, for a minute, I almost thought he was going to hit the doctor!"

"He'd be worse than a buffalo to fight with," laughed Dr. Brookes, good-naturedly. "The fates forbid that I should ever come to blows with such a rival as the ranchman!"

"Oh, we've all forgotten something again!" exclaimed Mrs. Burnside; "we've forgotten to ask his name! How wonderfully stupid!"

"I know who he is," spoke up Orrin Olcott. "I meant to tell before, but I clean forgot it. He is known as Commodore Dickson, and he's a bachelor, they say, and besides, he's the richest ranchman in Arizona!"

"Gee whiz!" murmured Bert, in a tone of alarm. "That last item settles it! We are sure to lose Marion!"

The young girl smiled, and a mischievous light sprang into her eyes.

She was going to have a little harmless fun out of the commodore's wooing.

"I just dote on horses and sheep and dogs," she said, merrily; "and, of course, he has a lot of them if he has a ranch. And then, oh, Bert, just think of seeing a 'round-up!' I've read all about them, and I think they must be grand! Now, if I can just learn to love the commodore, what an ideal life I could live in Arizona!"

She laughed merrily as she spoke, and the others all joined her except Dr. Brookes, who had suddenly grown silent.

"Well, I wish you luck, I am sure," spoke up Miss Ellis, gayly. "I should want dogs and horses and a lot of things, Marion, to recompense me for the society of that roaring lion! But I have always said you would fall in love very suddenly, and, you know, it is only the unexpected that happens."

"Come on! The commodore is waiting!" called out Bert, at the doorway.

Marion took a sly glance at the doctor, only to find his eyes fixed upon her face.

A smile curved her sweet lips that sent a thrill of joy to his heart.

After that he was not in the least afraid of her loving the ranchman.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS.

It was a glorious start. The ring of sleighbells was in the air, and every one enjoyed it hugely.

Each member of the company was able to go, and they were all seated in sleighs except Marion and the commodore, who occupied a light cutter, behind the spirited mustangs. There were plenty of robes, and all were bundled up warmly. They soon passed the others, and then dashed out into the suburbs, where the streets finally faded into country roads.

"Of course he'll propose to her," Bert said, as he lost sight of them. "I'd give a dollar to know what the old fellow will say to her!"

"Why, I can tell you, Bert," said his sweetheart, who was beside him. "He'll say what they all say, only, perhaps, he will say it a little blunter. It's the same old chestnut, you know, only it has variations!"

"Well, I'll be blowed! You talk as though you'd been proposed to every ten minutes in the day for years," retorted Bert, as he looked down at her with great dignity. "Now, what did I say when I proposed, Miss Experience? Did I give you a chestnut with variations?"

Miss Ellis shook her head.

"I can't remember what you said, Bert," she whispered, very softly; "I guess I was too surprised, or too something or other; but I know one thing you did not say, and I did not like it a bit, either!"

In an instant the commodore was entirely forgotten, and Bert's arm was around his sweetheart.

"What was it, darling? I'll say it now," he said, softly. "I'll say anything, do anything, to prove that I love you!"

"Oh, you do, do you?" cried the girl, happily. "Well, that is what I wanted to know! You said everything else except, 'I love you.'"

A kiss followed the words, and then Bert spoke more softly than ever.

"But you knew I loved you, girlie, so what was the difference?"

Miss Ellis pouted out her lips so far that Bert took another kiss.

"A girl always wants to hear that she is loved," she said, sweetly. "Now, how would you have felt, Bert, if I hadn't said it?"

Bert straightened up and a mischievous look crept into his eyes.

"It wouldn't have mattered whether you said it or not," he said, airily; "I knew you loved me, and that was enough. It wasn't at all necessary to ask any questions!"

"Oh, Bert! You mean thing! I'll never forgive you!" cried the girl. "You are altogether too conceited for me to ever marry you!"

"Well, I'll have lots of time to get over my failing before that happy event," sighed Bert. "Why, just think! it will be three years before we can dream of marriage! That's one reason why I was so long in proposing, darling."

A sigh followed the words, and Miss Ellis echoed it. She knew exactly why Bert had been so "tardy," as Marion called it.

"Never mind, we can wait, dear," she said, very bravely. "If we stick to each other for three long years, I guess it will be sure proof that we will stick forever!"

"I should say so," said Bert, dolefully; "but I don't like it a bit, and, between you and me, girlie, I've got a little scheme in my noddle! I'm not built on a 'waiting' plan where a wife is concerned, and there's an old adage that I've heard that I am going to put in practice. You've heard people say that 'what isn't worth asking for isn't worth having.' Well, I'm going to ask dad if I can't get married right away! It won't do any harm to ask him, will it?"

Miss Ellis straightened up in the sleigh and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Oh, if you are going to marry your father, why, ask him, of course; but before you marry me, you'll have to ask me, Mr. Jackson, and thus far in our conversation the wedding day has not been mentioned."

"Well, what do you say to Easter?" asked Bert, promptly. "We might have a double wedding with Alma and her lover. It would be jolly, wouldn't it; that is, if dad was willing?"

"It would be lovely, Bert!" was the happy answer; "but there's just one drawback—I'd hate to leave Marion!"

"Oh, Marion will be married soon! I haven't a doubt of it," was the cheerful answer. "She'll wake up to the fact that she has a heart some fine day, and then, oh, then, won't some fellow be lucky!"

"Suppose it should be the commodore!" cried Miss Ellis, musingly; "for, to come back to the beginning of our talk, of course he will propose to her."

"And what do you suppose our Marion will say? If she was any other girl in the world she would accept the fellow," was Bert's answer.

"Why should she, Bert?" Miss Ellis asked, sharply. "What in the world could Marion or any girl see in that old fellow to love! He's nice enough, but he's too old and bluff for a husband."

"You think a young fellow with sweet manners is preferable, don't you, dear?" asked Bert, glibly, as he drew the ribbons over a stubborn pair of bronchos and urged them up a little.

"Nonsense! I don't like sweet manners—that is not in a man," said the young girl, promptly. "I wouldn't care a mite for you, Bert, if you were always sweet. In fact, I think I loved you best when you treated me the shabbiest."

Her voice was very low, but Bert managed to hear it, and he gathered the reins in his right hand so he could put his left arm around her.

"When did I treat you shabbily, dearest?" he asked, softly. "I never intended to do that, at any stage of our acquaintance."

Miss Ellis pouted for a minute, and then burst out laughing.

"You flirted awfully, Bert; you know you did! Why, just think of the soubrettes that you have made love to, right under my eyes! I've been almost green with jealousy, but I wouldn't show it."

Bert squeezed her a little tighter, and then had to remove his arm quickly, for the ponies were getting the best of him.

"All the flirting I have ever done has been done right before your eyes, as you say," he said, candidly. "That's better than doing it behind your back, isn't it? I couldn't have deceived you, because—well, because I loved you."

"Oh, Bert! What will your foster-father say?" began Miss Ellis, timidly; "and, oh, dear, you have to leave me to go to college next fall! I shall die, I know I shall, before that college course is over!"

"No, you won't!" said Bert, stoutly;

"you'll just laugh and grow fat. When I am ready to marry you, I expect you to be a famous actress; but, oh, gee whiz! I forgot something, darling! Dad expects me to study for the ministry, you know! Well, won't that be a combination! A minister marrying an actress!"

"Oh, Bert, you are not serious?" said Miss Ellis, as soon as she could stop laughing; "you certainly have no idea of ever becoming a minister."

Bert pursed up his lips and gazed away across the smooth, white snow.

"I'm almost too good to be anything else," he said, calmly. "Really, I think I was intended to grace a pulpit; I'd make just the sort of a minister that all the ladies in the parish would like. Just think of the 'sewing bees' and 'teas' and 'sociables' that I could drop in at!"

"Hem! Some people are wonderfully stuck on themselves," remarked his sweetheart, coolly; "but if it is feminine adoration that you are looking for, you had better stick to the stage. A minister isn't 'in it' with a *matinée* idol!"

"I guess you are right," laughed Bert, as he drew out the whip; "but honestly, now, dear, I don't want any one to love me but you, for, to tell you the truth, your affection has the strangest effect upon me."

"Why, Bert! What do you mean?" asked the girl, as she noticed the solemn look in his face.

"I can't explain it exactly, but it makes me feel queer," was the quiet answer. "I'm not half so stuck on myself as I was before. Somehow, I think it has scared me a little to know that you love me."

"I understand, Bert," said Miss Ellis, softly, "and I feel that way, too. I guess true love is apt to humble one a little. We keep asking ourselves if we are really worthy."

"That's it," assented Bert, with a look of relief. "That is what I meant, but I couldn't quite say it."

There was a moment's silence, for Bert was busy with the ponies and Miss Ellis was gazing about on a bit of wild country, desolate in its barren appearance.

"How quickly one can leave the city behind," she said, dreamily.

Bert's only answer was a smothered exclamation.

There was a clatter of hoofs and a man passed them on horseback. He was mounted on a powerful horse and dashed past like a cyclone.

"It's that pickpocket! I am sure of it!" muttered Bert, between his teeth. "It is one of those fellows that I saw on the train. Now, where in thunder do you suppose he is going?"

Miss Ellis thought a minute as she watched the retreating figure, which was soon lost to sight in the curve of the roadway.

"If I only knew, I would tell the police. They are supposed to be watching him," was Bert's next comment.

"Marion and the commodore went that way, didn't they?" asked Miss Ellis. "Oh, Bert, you don't suppose he is after the ranchman, do you? He surely couldn't rob him in broad daylight! Why, the commodore is as big as two of that fellow!"

"That doesn't count," said Bert, as he whipped up the ponies. "That rascal may be armed, and probably the commodore is not. He's just the sort of a man who would scorn to carry a weapon."

"Still, he could easily get away with that team of mustangs," said the girl, again; "and another thing, Bert—they may have gone in some other direction. How can any one be sure exactly where he will drive? A man never knows himself, when he has his sweetheart with him!"

Bert laughed aloud, and then drew in the ponies suddenly.

"I guess you are right. Look there," he said, gayly. "I nearly ran over that black thing in the middle of the road. Now, what, in the name of all the stars, is it?"

They both strained their eyes, but the ponies would not stand still, and it was impossible to get a clear view of the object.

"Just pull them in tight, and I'll go and see," said Miss Ellis, quickly. "Not for ten thousand worlds would I be left alone in this sleigh! Why, those beasts would land me in the Pacific Ocean!"

"Well, they won't land me anywhere that I don't want to go!" said Bert, determinedly. Then, with a masterly hand, he quieted the two bronchos.

Miss Ellis sprang out and ran on ahead to where a mysterious-looking something lay in the snow.

She bent down eagerly and picked it up. The next moment she uttered a cry of genuine alarm, and, with the thing in her hand, hurried back to the wagon.

"It's a black cloak and a mask," she said, holding them out, so that Bert could see them. "And, of course, it's that fellow on horseback that has dropped them."

"That means that there's trouble ahead!" cried Bert, quickly. "That fellow is really on the track of the commodore! Jump in, quick, darling, and we'll try the speed of these beasts! I'm going to the rescue of our traveling companion—for Marion is with him!"

CHAPTER IX.

A "HOLD-UP."

While Bert and Miss Ellis were talking so sweetly, another love scene had been going on in the little cutter behind the spirited mustangs.

The commodore and Marion had left the city far behind them, and were speeding like the wind through the open country.

The morning was bright with sunshine, and the air felt cold and invigorating. The young girl's cheeks were flushed with pleasure. It was the first time she had ever ridden behind Mexican mustangs, and the commodore entertained her with an enthusiastic history of his horses.

"Do please let me drive! I am sure I can manage them!" She said the words with her beautiful eyes fixed upon the spirited team, and, at the same time, she held out her hands for her companion to place the lines in them.

They were several miles ahead of the rest of their party, but, in her enjoyment of the drive, Marion had quite forgotten the distance.

The old commodore passed her the lines with a look of admiration in his eyes. He did not doubt for a moment that she could drive the ponies.

"Now, thet thar is jest what I like! Gimme er gal with spirit every time!" he said, laughing. "Reck'n now you'd ride hossback over the prairies, an' never turn er hair. Would ye like ter try er gallop on ther finest saddle hoss in ther country, Miss Marler?"

Marion's eyes sparkled with excitement, for she had always longed to ride horseback.

"Oh, I would, indeed!" was her joyous answer. "When I was at home, in the country, I used to ride 'Old Ben.' He was a lovely old horse, but, of course, he had no spirit. Too many years behind a plough doesn't improve a horse, I fancy, and 'Old Ben' had been everything, from a carriage horse to a plough horse."

"How'd yer ride?" asked the commodore, with a twinkle in his eye.

Marion blushed a little, but she answered, unhesitatingly:

"Straddle, of course! Father didn't have a side saddle, and neither did the neighbors; but we were little girls then—my sister and

l—so, as there was no one to see us, it didn't matter."

"I reck'n it didn't," was the ranchman's quick reply. "I reck'n you two wuz as pretty as pictures on thet thar old nag! Pity you couldn't hev had er thoroughbred, though. I've got no end er thoroughbreds, an' some on 'em air beauties!"

"Oh, how lovely!" cried the fair girl, as she guided the mustangs over a rough place sticking out of the snow. "And do you have dogs on your ranch, and sheep and cattle?"

The old fellow nodded. He was perfectly happy now. The young girl had started him upon his particular hobby.

"Ther's the finest kennel in Arizony on thet thar ranch, ef I do say so, Miss Marler," he said, proudly. "Ther's setters, an' pointers, an' bloodhounds by ther dozen."

Marion gave a cry of dismay as he mentioned the last.

"Oh, Mr. Dickson! why do you raise bloodhounds? They are such dreadful creatures! I have a perfect horror of them!"

"Wa'al, they come purty handy in our country," was the ranchman's answer. "Thar's need of er bloodhound now an' agin, an' I kin tell yer er good one is er right down useful critter. Why, not er month passes on ther ranch without sumthin' or other bein' stole, an' powerful snakes! a man wouldn't stan' no show ter ketch ther thief ef it wuzn't fer them dog detectives. Jes give 'em er snif of ther feller's footprints, an' away they go, as true as er bullet! 'Tain't often my dogs come back with their tails atween ther legs. They're gen'rally in at ther death—an' thet's what makes 'em vally'ble."

"But it is such an awful thing to hunt human beings with dogs!" murmured Marion, with a shudder.

"Ther dogs is more human than the scally wag they're after, every time, Miss Marler," was the solemn answer. "Why, my dogs would be ashamed ter do what some of our Arizony ruff-scuff takes pride in doin'; an' I reck'n thet thar is erbout ther condition in other parts of ther country. A dog wouldn't steal yer cattle, nor put er bullet in yer back. Ef he wuz er goin' ter hurt ye at all, there'd be a growl of warnin'. They'd give yer time ter pertect yerself, or git outer ther way, an' thet thar ain't ther practice of human bein's."

Marion breathed a sigh. She knew he spoke truthfully. How many times had she been the victim of some human being's treachery?

The country was growing a little wilder now, and the young girl suddenly thought of the other members of the party.

She glanced back over her shoulder, but there was no one in sight. The next minute a vicious plunge of the ponies forced her to give them all of her attention.

"Well done! Thet thar wuz as good ez I could do it! You'll make er driver ter be proud of, an' no mistake," said the commodore, approvingly, as she pulled in the mustangs.

Then he suddenly leaned forward a little and put one of his big hands over both of her own.

"Don't ye think yer'd like ther ranch?" he said, as softly as his big voice would permit. "Don't yer think yer'd like ter live among ther dogs an' lambs an' hosses? It's er nice place, Miss Marler; an' ther scen'ry is beautiful! Ye could hev yer friends ter visit yer, partickerly yer sister Dollie, an' I'd make yer as happy as any lady in ther land! Don't yer think yer could marry ther grizzly old ranchman?"

It had come at last, but Marion was partially prepared for it, so she was able to think and speak very calmly.

"You are very good, indeed, to like me, sir," she said, simply; "but I am sure you will understand when I tell you that I have

never loved, and that I could not possibly marry a man unless I loved him."

She looked up into his face with such an earnest glance that for a moment the ranchman gazed down at her in silence.

"I reck'n now yer couldn't," he said, after a minute. "Some women could—ther most on em', mebbe—but yer're too honest fer thet thar, an' I reck'n thet's why I like yer!"

"I think it would be wicked to marry without love," went on the young girl, quietly; "and I am too young, anyway, to think of marriage yet. I am only eighteen, and I have only been out in the world a few short months. I have a great deal to learn, both of myself and others, before I can decide such a serious question."

"I reck'n you air right," said the man, again. Then he touched the right rein to pull one of the ponies in a little.

"I'm sorry yer feel so, of course," he went on, slowly: "but 'tain't my natur ter try ter influence ye none. Ef yer don't want ter do it, I wouldn't hev yer: but I'd powerful like ter see yer change! Somehow, I've got my heart sot on seein' yer on ther ranch. It would be like er bust of sunshine ter hev yer sittin' on ther he'athstun."

Marion's eyes filled with tears at the bluff ranchman's words. There was poetry and pathos in the soul of this man, who looked like a desperado and used such rude language.

"Perhaps I could visit you—with the company, I mean," she said, quickly. "I don't know exactly where we are to go after we reach Denver, but Mr. Temple is planning to extend the tour a little further."

"Thar'll be a welcome fer ther hull kit an' boodle ŏf yer," was the answer. "I kin promise yer a good time, an' ther purtiest scen'ry in ther country; an' if it comes ter big game, as them kids wuz er sayin', I reck'n I c'u'd manage ter give 'em er glimpse of er bar, or mebby er moose—all accordin' ter sarcumstances!"

"That would be grand," began Marion, but the rest of her sentence was cut short.

They were passing a clump of low evergreen trees that formed almost a grove, and the roadway was becoming a trifle narrower.

The mustang on the right pricked up his ears. The next moment he stood still and snorted furiously.

"Hello! thar's somethin' wrong!" said the commodore, quickly. "Thet thar hoss wouldn't do thet ef thar wuzn't sumthin' ther matter. Jes' give me ther lines er minute, an' I'll——"

The rest of the sentence was never spoken.

There was a crack of a pistol, and the frightened mustang fell like a log in his tracks. The next second two masked men, on horseback, dashed out of the bushes just ahead, while a third appeared in the road at the rear of the wagon.

Marion uttered a low cry, and then sat perfectly still.

She knew in an instant exactly what had happened.

The rich commodore was being "held up" by desperate highwaymen.

CHAPTER X.

THE PURSUIT.

It was a dreadful moment, and the young girl glanced about wildly.

The place was a desolate one, and there was no one to help. Then she turned and looked at the face of her companion.

He had half risen in the sleigh when the mustang fell. The next second he whipped a monstrous revolver from his overcoat pocket and proceeded to make the weapon crack merrily.

Bert was not the only one who had been wrong in guaging the ranchman's judgment. The highwaymen had, much to their dismay, found him quite prepared for emergencies.

The thing had been badly planned, or it was novices who were doing it; and in the brief minute at the beginning of the onslaught the commodore gained the advantage.

Marion's hand still grasped both the lines and the whip, so the old fellow was free to defend himself, and he was doing it with a vengeance that astonished the ruffians.

The remaining mustang was plunging and rearing now, and the masked giant who was trying vainly to catch its head was an easy target for the ranchman's bullet.

He dropped from his horse with a yell of pain. There was a gush of red blood through the black mask over his features. Another bullet whizzed over Marion's head, but she did not make a sound. The brave girl was trying to be calm, but her wits seemed deserting her.

Then followed what seemed to her to be a perfect fusillade of bullets, although, in reality, not a dozen shots were exchanged.

The highwaymen had not intended to make such a racket, but the commodore hoped with all his heart that the report of his pistol might bring some one to their assistance.

Suddenly, the brave old fellow gave a sharp groan of agony, and his left arm dropped at his side in a helpless manner.

But he did not flinch, and his voice was like a lion's as he roared out a word of defiance at the desperadoes. A bullet or two did not matter to him. If the miscreants went through his pockets, it would be when he was dead or dying.

The second mustang fell in the snow, his jugular vein pierced by a ball that was intended for his master. Then another shot rang out, and the commodore had emptied his weapon.

Were they waiting for this?

Marion glanced behind her involuntarily.

The sight that she beheld thrilled her soul with horror.

The commodore had disabled the two ruffians ahead of him, but behind his back there was another, whose weapon had not spoken yet, but it was covering the ranchman with deadly precision.

"Throw up your hands!"

Marion heard the words, intermingled with a volley of oaths.

The commodore was facing his enemy now with a look of indecision upon his features.

"Oh, do it, sir! Quick!" murmured Marion, excitedly. "He will shoot you dead! Please do as he tells you!"

The commodore still waited—he even glanced behind him. There was nothing to be feared from the fellow's two companions.

"Now, don't move a muscle, or I'll blow you to blazes!" said the robber, coarsely, as he urged his horse a little nearer to the sleigh.

Marion clenched the whip tighter and set her teeth fiercely. Every drop of blood in her body was seething with indignation.

The old commodore slowly raised his uninjured arm above his head; the other was dripping with blood—he could not move it. He had seen something in Marion's face that set him to thinking, and the bluff ranchman was always ready to use precaution with valor.

"Now, miss, I'll trouble you to go through his pockets and hand out his wad—and be quick about it!" was the next sullen order. "He's killed my friends, and I'm entitled to something! Quick! give me his watch and the wad, and I won't trouble you any longer."

He had not moved his glance as he spoke, and for a second the young girl hesitated. It was not her nature to yield readily to such orders.

"You are wasting time! Do as I tell you!" roared the fellow again, at the same time heaping hideous curses upon her.

Marion half rose in the sleigh, and turned upon him scornfully, but, at the same time,

she made a movement as if she meant to obey his order.

The man, still holding the weapon leveled upon them, came a step nearer.

The hot breath from the panting nostrils of his horse came over her shoulder.

With her left hand she detached the commodore's watchchain from his belt; then turned and held it out toward the robber.

A sharp swerve of the horse followed, which brought the ruffian still nearer.

It was what Marion wanted, and in an instant she had acted. The long, lithe whip turned like magic in her fingers, and, with a flourish that cut the air with a hiss, it landed squarely across the fellow's masked features.

At that same instant the commodore sprang from the sleigh and made a grab for a revolver that lay in the roadway.

Again the whip was laid across the man's face. His horse reared and plunged and snorted frantically: then a fearful cut over the hand sent his weapon spinning. Without waiting for anything more, the fellow wheeled around and dashed down the road at a headlong gallop.

The commodore snapped the weapon after him, but every chamber was empty, and the injured arm prevented his reloading it quickly.

The fellow was escaping. What should he do? The old ranchman answered his own question in the fraction of a second.

Reaching up to the sleigh, he caught Marion around the waist. The next second he had swung her to the back of one of the highwaymen's horses—the only one of the two that had remained beside his master.

With a keen glance, he had discovered that the animal was both safe and gentle. He had also discovered that one of the ruffians was moving.

"Quick! git after him, Miss Marion! Ye kin keep him in sight!" he said, sharply. "When I've settled with these hyar rascals, I'll come arter yer like er cyclone!"

"But you—how will you come?" asked the girl, as she clung to the saddle.

The commodore glanced around. The other horse had gone. There was not much chance of his "following like a cyclone."

"Never mind! I'll catch him, if I can!" said the young girl, bravely. "Bind up your arm while I am gone. I may be able to get help, even if I do not catch the robber. Oh, I do hope this horse won't throw me!"

"I'll resk yer!" cried the ranchman, in his hearty voice.

The next second the brave young girl was off like a whirlwind.

CHAPTER XI.

WORSE DANGER.

As she dashed from his sight, the old commodore turned back to his late assailants. There was a smile upon his bearded lips, in spite of the pain he was suffering, for Marion's bravery had thrilled every fibre of his being.

"She's er fine one, an' no mistake," he muttered, as he pulled off his coat and tied his handkerchief tightly over the jagged bullet hole in his arm. "Thet thar is courage, an' no mistake. She won't ketch him, of course; nor come nowheres nigh him, but this hyar warn't no sight fer her ter see. She's safer on thet thar critter's back. He's too gentle ter throw her."

He finished binding his arm, and then moved it slightly. It was a relief for him to find that no bones were broken.

Then he turned to the two ruffians who were stretched upon the ground. The first one was stone dead, but the other was groaning.

"Reck'n now yer won't hold up no more honest men, yer lubbers," he muttered, chuckling, as he raised the living man from the

snow to a sitting posture, so he could take a good look at him.

The fellow winced. He was bleeding profusely. The commodore drew another handkerchief from his pocket and proceeded to bandage a broken arm as well as he was able.

"Thar now! I'd arter let yer die," he said, as he finished. "Sech scallywags as yew orter be got rid of quicker'n scat; but I reck'n now thet shootin' is too good fer yer. A swing at er rope's end will come nearer ter punishin' yer!"

The fellow had regained consciousness from the pain of having his arm moved, but he did not speak, and the commodore turned his back upon him in order to look at his horses.

In an instant two great tears were rolling down his cheeks. Here were two faithful friends that he might grieve for.

He drew his coat sleeve across his eyes; but he was not ashamed of his tears. It was awful to see such noble animals sacrificed.

"Reck'n now I feel wuss erbout it on ercount of her likin' ye so much," he muttered, softly. "She was mighty taken with ther mustangs, an' no mistake! Poor girl! she won't fergit this sight. It's er pity she had ter see it."

He half lifted the injured robber into an easier position, and then gave the fellow a drink from a flask that he found in his pocket; but there was not a trace of pity in the act—he was only trying to save him so as not to cheat the gallows.

He had torn off their masks and recognized them at once. They were two of the trio who had tried to rob him on the wrecked train while he had been working like a hero to rescue the passengers of the derailed and burning coaches.

And, meanwhile, Marion was passing through one of the strangest experiences of her eventful life.

She was following like Nemesis upon the track of the escaping robber.

She had never even seen such a horse before as the one upon which she was mounted. It was a thoroughbred, without doubt, and she was terribly afraid of him at first, and had to cling to the saddle to keep him from unseating her.

But as they flew along she seemed to suddenly lose her fear, and as her courage rose she straightened herself and sat as erect in the saddle as any experienced horsewoman.

There was a flush upon her cheeks and a light in her eyes. She had a victory to achieve, and nothing should daunt her.

A moving black object far ahead showed her that the ruffian was still fleeing, and now and then, as he would disappear and reappear again, each fresh glimpse made her urge her horse faster.

Oh, if she could get near enough to see his face again! She must be able to identify him, even if some one else had to capture him.

Her eagerness increased with every rod of her wild ride, and, as she saw that her steed was rapidly gaining upon him, every vestige of fear vanished in the longing to outride him.

It was a fearful chase—and what would be the outcome?

She had no weapon; so she could not possibly take the fellow prisoner; but the commodore had told her to go after the ruffian, and it did not occur to her to think any further.

"It's just like sailing through the air," she cried out, suddenly. "It isn't hard a bit, after one gets a little accustomed to it. Oh, I shall just love you, you dear horse, if you catch that fellow!"

And the noble animal was certainly straining every nerve. The snow-clad rocks and trees seemed to fly past as he rushed on toward a sharp turn in the roadway, which had just hidden her "quarry."

"Faster, boy, faster!" she urged, as she patted the noble animal's neck. She had lost all fear now, and was bending low in the saddle, like a jockey who hoped, by throwing his weight forward, to carry his mount to victory.

Suddenly a shout from some one in the distance was wafted to her ears, but she could not locate the direction from whence it came.

Without checking the speed of her horse, she put her hands to her mouth and answered it like a clarion.

Was it some one coming to her rescue and the commodore's?

She listened intently as she dashed recklessly forward.

Around the turn she knew there was a rough bit of roadway, bordered on either side by stunted trees and low bushes.

Perhaps the fellow had been headed off by some one coming from the city.

The thought gave her fresh courage. But as she dashed around the curve she almost gasped in amazement.

The robber was not in sight, yet she was only a minute behind him. As she glanced sharply ahead, she could see where the tracks of the horse ended.

She checked her horse involuntarily.

The fellow had escaped. A cry of disappointment fell from her lips as she realized her position. He was no doubt hidden in the bushes that bordered the roadway. But, thank Heaven, he was unarmed—he could not shoot her!

She moved forward cautiously, with her glance darting here and there. As she leaned low in her saddle to peer at the light hoof-prints in the snow, there was a crackle in the bushes, and her horse swerved sharply.

The next instant there was a crash that startled the spirited animal, and, with a fearful bound, he started forward.

Marion clung to the saddle, and might have kept her seat, but there was a swish of a noose just over her head; then something like a light rope settled down around her shoulders.

A quick, sharp jerk followed, and she felt herself slipping from the saddle. There was a gasp and a cry of horror as the horse sped on without her; then a horrible darkness seemed to come upon her.

She had fallen into a rift of snow at one side of the road.

CHAPTER XII.

SAFETY.

When Marion next opened her eyes she could hardly believe her senses. She was lying upon a carriage robe spread out on the snow at the side of the roadway, and Bert Jackson and Miss Ellis were bending over her.

There was a cry of joy from Miss Ellis as Marion opened her eyes; then she felt her hand and wrist covered with the affectionate girl's kisses.

"Oh, Marion, you darling! You are all right at last, aren't you?" she asked, delightedly. "Thank God! Bert and I were just in time. The fellow escaped, but we saved you. Marion!"

The young girl's beautiful eyes asked the question that her lips could not frame, and Bert, who was briskly rubbing her hands, attempted to answer their eager inquiry.

"He lassoed you, Marion. Just think of that! We were just in time to see him do it—and, upon my word, Buffalo Bill isn't in it! Why, he swung that lariat like a flash of lightning. The next minute you were out of the saddle and buried in a snow bank. I thought every bone in your body must be broken."

Marion smiled up at him bravely, and managed to whisper a few words.

"They feel as if they were, Bert," she murmured, softly; "but did you see him clearly? Can you identify the fellow?"

"You bet!" was Bert's answer. "Why, he was on the train! I warned the commodore against him when he was counting his money there in the car."

Marion tried to rise to a sitting posture, for the commodore's name had revived her. With the color rushing back to her cheeks, she clutched Bert's arm frantically.

"Never mind me, now, Bert! You must go to him!" she cried, wildly. "He was held up by three of them—and, oh, they shot him, Bert! Go, quick! You may be too late. Miss Ellis and I will wait together!"

"Yes, go, Bert!" urged his sweetheart; but Bert shut his lips, decidedly.

"Leave you two alone, especially with Marion in this condition? Not much! It would be a crazy thing to do. I am sorry for the commodore, but I've got my hands full at present."

"Then we must get back to town as fast as possible," said Marion, determinedly. "Put me in the sleigh, Bert, and then hurry, hurry!"

Bert started to obey, and was just raising her gently when the sound of sleigh-bells was heard.

"Oh, it is the doctor and Alma!" cried Miss Ellis, delightedly.

The next moment Dr. Brookes was bending over Marion.

Two hours later the young girl was lying upon her bed in her room at the hotel, and three of Omaha's best physicians were in attendance upon her.

Fortunately, no bones were broken, but she had been severely bruised. It would be several days before she could venture from the apartment.

When Bert found the commodore he was still mourning over his horses, but he handed the two robbers over to the police with a smile of satisfaction.

"Reck'n now thet thar feller is er gittin' his pay somewhars else," he said, as they placed the dead robber into the patrol wagon that had been sent out from the city. "But this hyar one wuz ther wust of ther two, an' he's been spared fer ther fate what's most fitted fer sech rascals. He'll dangle from ther gallers, if he ever hez ther luck ter git thar!"

"Well, the one that lassoed Marion will never get there, if I can help it!" exclaimed Bert, furiously. "I'm not usually revengeful, but I wouldn't answer for myself if I came face to face with that fellow! I'd be sorely tempted to commit instant murder!"

"I shall never forget it!" cried Miss Ellis, when the members of the company gathered in Marion's room later. "We had just caught sight of Marion, when he dashed out of the bushes, and Bert whipped up the broncos and yelled like an Indian! That scared the fellow, and away he went! Why, it wasn't a second before he had vanished!"

"Yes, and I couldn't go after him," said Bert, regretfully. "When I saw Marion lying in the road I forgot everything else. But the police assure me that they will catch the ruffian."

"It's the first 'hold-up' they have had so near here for some time, they tell me," said Dr. Brookes, soberly; "and, of course, poor Marion had to be the victim."

He gave the young girl a tender look, and as he put his fingers upon her pulse he pressed her hand gently.

"Well, the commodore was a brave man to settle two of them," chimed in Miss Allyn. "Now, to make the proper ending to the tragedy, he ought to marry Marion—but, dear me, where would the girl be if she had married all her rescuers! Why, she has been the heroine of a score of such adventures; and yet the heroes—some of them—are here today, and not a blessed one of them has been rewarded."

"Let's see—our friend Archie Ray was the first hero, was he not?" asked Miss Ellis, mischievously; "and the doctor was the next, and Howard Everett, the dramatic critic, was the next——"

"Oh, you can't begin to name them—they are legion!" laughed Miss Allyn; "and yet Marion remains as heart whole and fancy free as she was at the beginning of her eventful career. It is simply marvelous! I cannot understand it."

"You would if you were in my place, Alma," laughed Marion. "They're all so noble and good that I cannot choose between them. But do somebody tell me how the commodore is faring."

"Oh, he's as sound as a dollar. That was merely a flesh wound," spoke up Mr. Temple. Then, as a loud rap came upon the door, he went promptly to open it. "Here he is this minute. Now, he can speak for himself," he said, quickly. And the next minute the old ranchman came in and went straight toward Marion.

"Ther bravest gal in ther worl'!" he said, in his monstrous voice. "Ef it hadn't been fer her, I'd er been plugged chock full of bullets; but she hit him er lick thet he won't fergit very soon. Yer'd orter see his face! It looks as ef er cyclone hed struck him!"

"What! Is he captured so soon?" asked Bert, hilariously.

The commodore nodded.

"They jest ketched him," he said, chuckling. "Thet thar hoss of his'n wuz winded somehow er other, an' they foun' him skulkin' in ther woods nussin' ther welts on his face thet this hyar nervy gal give him."

There was general rejoicing at the pleasant news, and then Mr. Temple stated that he intended giving the company a 'two-days' vacation.

"I shall not try to fill Marion's place and

give a performance," he said, decidedly; "for the public insist upon seeing Marion Marlowe. When she is entirely well, we will open the box-office. The public will have to wait until our star is out of danger."

"That will be a long time, if the future is like the past," said Bert, dolefully; "for you can bet if there's anything going on Marion will be in it! It's her luck to play the leading part in every tragedy of life's existence!"

Marion smiled serenely, and there was a merry light in her eyes.

"Well, no star actress in the tragedy of life was ever better 'supported' than I am," she said, gently. "My company certainly share both my sorrows and my honors. I'm afraid I should soon cease to be the heroine if it wasn't for the heroes."

"Said as only our Marion can say it!" cried Bert. "The dear girl's head will never swell, no matter how much she is honored!"

And in expressing this sentiment Bert said it all.

Marion was always the same gentle, modest girl, in spite of the fact that the world knew her to be a heroine.

At her first appearance in Omaha, the theatre was packed, and Marion was forced to appear a dozen times before the curtain, while basket after basket of floral tributes were passed to her over the footlights.

At first, the courage and heroism of the young girl was all that was thought of, but after that, when the talented actress was holding them breathless in the spell of her sweet voice, another burst of applause followed, this time for her genius.

They only gave two performances, but Mr. Temple was happy, for the "standing room only" sign was displayed both evenings.

Marion had refused the commodore's offer of marriage, but the old fellow was not dismayed.

Between Omaha and Kansas City there was a week of "one night stands," and then came another thrilling experience.

When Marion left Omaha, she had the satisfaction of knowing that the two robbers were safe in jail, and the authorities, with the commodore to help them, were prosecuting their cases vigorously.

Every one had heard of their miserable deportment on the wrecked train, and this, more than the "hold up," angered the citizens of Omaha against them. Anything was too good for men who would rob and plunder in an emergency like that. There was not a vestige of pity to be meted out to them.

Only a few weeks remained of Marion's starring tour, and each engagement added fresh laurels to her fame as an actress; while, as the days passed by, she was loved more and more by those who knew best her brave and loyal nature.

THE END.

Next week's MY QUEEN (No. 23) will contain the story of an exciting adventure Marion had in the cab of an engine on the plains. It will be entitled "Marion Marlowe on the Prairie; or, A Thrilling Ride Across Kansas."

PATTERN COLUMN.

By special arrangements with the manufacturers we are enabled to supply the readers of MY QUEEN with the patterns of all garments described or illustrated in this column at TEN CENTS each. Address, "Pattern Column," MY QUEEN, 238 William Street, New York City.

☞ *In ordering patterns be sure to give size and number*

No. 2,415—CHILD'S EMPIRE APRON.

Empire fashions are very graceful for children, and just now very much the rage. This dainty little apron is pictured in white nainsook, with a waist of all-over embroidery. Lawn muslin or cambric, either plain, striped, or cross-barred, is suitable for making the apron.

The pattern is cut in sizes 2 to 6 years. Size 6 requires two and one-half yards of 7-inch, or one and three-fourth yards of 36-inch material. As shown, one and three-eighth yards of 36 inch, with one-half yard of all-over and four yards of edging, are necessary.

No. 2,430—SEVEN-GORED SKIRT.

(Having a flat circular flounce at the foot.)

Mixed gray homespun would make a serviceable skirt after this model. Serge, cheviot cloth, Ziberline, Vigourcaux and covert are suitable fabrics for the design.

The pattern is cut in sizes 22 to 30 inches waist measure. Size 24 requires four and one-half yards of 42-inch, or four and one-fourth yards of 54-inch material.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY

GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, is well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. As all letters are answered only through the columns of "MY QUEEN," it is unnecessary to enclose stamps.

STREET & SMITH.

"I see that you are as good and kind as Marion was to the unfortunate, so I will come to you for a little advice. I am a married woman with two children, a boy and girl and also have a niece that I am raising. Her mother died at my house when she was nine days old. Her father has never seen her since she was three months old and has never helped take care of her in any way. It was her mother's request that I should raise her and I promised her on her deathbed that I would do so. She is now eight years old. Do you think I would be committing a sin to give her up or send her to her father? He is married a second time and is more able to care for her than my husband and myself.

"MRS. M. L. S."

There are indeed plenty of girls as good and brave as Marion Marlowe, and there are, doubtless, many more whose intentions are as admirable as her's, but who, as you say, lack the will power to carry them out. The proper person to care for and support a child is the parent. You should insist upon this child's father providing for her support and education. If her opportunities for getting on in the world would be better with him than with yourself, it would be "committing a sin" to deprive her of them.

"My husband has grown to be so different from what he used to be! He is a drinking man and ugly. He tells me he pays the bills and he does not do it, and they come to me. He is jealous and has called me dreadful names because I spoke to a man, an old friend. He will not ask me to forgive him for what he said. I have two children and have always been faithful and true. He says he loves other women, and I want to find out if it is true. Please advise me how is the best way to get along with him. MRS. C."

There are many such husbands as yours, we are sorry to say, and you should have studied this man's character more closely before you married him. We can only advise you now to "make the best of a bad bargain." Remain "faithful and true" so long as you live with him. Talk to him gently and try to reason with him. Perhaps by being patient and kind, you may make him ashamed of his evil ways. To win a husband from sin to righteousness is a great victory for a wife, so, if you feel that you still love him, you would do well to try.

"I would be so happy to see you personally. I am a teacher of German, Italian and French. I am fifty years old and am in bitter want. I have no lessons. My health is broken down, and more, I need clothes. I used to canvass expensive books, but I could not make much by it. I am in deep despair. I am without a friend.

"ELENORE."

We pity you sincerely, but can only advise you to "try, try again." Surely, with your ability, you must soon get a few scholars. The great city of New York is so very, very full of unfortunate people that, should we help them all, we should soon be added to the number; but our earnest sympathy goes out to you in your friendlessness. Can you not try some other way besides the one you mention in which to earn your living? It is the sticking to one thing that brings so many to disaster.

"I am in the deepest kind of trouble. I am nearly sixteen and have been going with a young fellow that I think a good deal of. I did not see any fault in him, but of late he has been using talk not fit for a lady to hear. As I do not wish mamma to know about this, I feel that I can consult you. What shall I do? EDYTH L. R."

We would advise you to discontinue the acquaintance of any man who uses language that is ungentlemanly. Do not have any acquaintances whom you cannot consult your mother about. There are lots of good men in the world and you are too young to spend your time with loafers.

"I am a bachelor of twenty-five, and a young girl of seventeen is drawing my attention a great deal of late. I am greatly in need of a wife, but hate the idea of giving up my single life for a married one. What would you advise me to do in this case? Can a man marry at the age of thirty as well as at twenty-five and live in as happily?

"A YOUNG B. S."

Since single life is so attractive to you, we would advise you to continue it. It is not much of a compliment to a woman's affection to "hate the idea" of marrying her. Men can marry quite as well at thirty as at twenty-five and the amount of sense and experience that they are apt to

acquire in those intervening years ought to make them more desirable husbands and their married life happier than if they had married prematurely.

"I am a girl eighteen years old and have a sweetheart. I love him very much, and he thinks a great deal of me. One evening he asked me for a kiss and I refused him, so now he does not think so much of me. Please advise me what to do. E. E."

Your lover's affection seems to be very easily swayed. The refusal of one kiss ought not to bias his regard, if he really thought "a great deal" of you. You are rather young to be worrying yourself about sweethearts. Let the boys alone for a few years and, when a genuine sweetheart does come your way, then, perhaps, his affection will be of a more substantial kind.

"For some time I have been corresponding with a young man of my acquaintance of whom I am very fond. A few months ago his letters dropped off and I have received none from him since. He says he is very busy and don't get time to write, but I think if he cared anything for me he might find a few moments in the day to drop me a line. I don't know whether it would be my place to write to him first or not. Please give me your opinion. Lolotte M."

If the young man really cared to continue the correspondence, he would find time to answer your letters. The fact that he makes excuses for not doing so ought to convince you that he is not anxious to continue writing. If he wrote you last, it would be proper for you to answer his letter, but we do not believe in young women wasting time or thought upon any man who is unappreciative of them.

"I am a young girl, twenty-two years old, and had been keeping company with a young man for three years and a half up to last August. He was a very bashful fellow and also quick-tempered. He had never spoken very plainly of matrimony still I think he had good intentions. We quarreled almost every time we were together as I am very quick-tempered myself. Last August I became acquainted with a young man whom I told I was already keeping company with another, but he kept asking me to go to different places of amusement and I went. After a while I grew rather tired of my old friend and quarreled with him, which I deeply regret. I have since given up number two's company and am going with an old friend whom I do not care much about. I really believe I can never care for another as I cared for number one, but he has never written nor shown any signs of making up. Please tell me whether to write to him or not; I hate to write, but it was my fault. S. B."

If the disagreeament was your fault, the only right thing for you to do is to say so frankly. We can see no reason why the young man should be expected to do the making up. We would judge that you were rather fickle in temperament and would advise you to be sure of your own affections before you seriously consider matrimony. A marriage based upon frequent quarrels and "making up" is not apt to be productive of much future happiness.

"I am a reader of 'My Queen,' and ask you to grant me a favor by informing me through your journal whether I have the right to sell our property after the death of my husband without he willing it over to me? My name and his were both on the bill of sale when we bought the property. Mrs. A. W."

You do not state whether the "property" you refer to is real or personal estate. We advise you, in either case, to consult a responsible lawyer in regard to the matter, as no one should engage in a transaction of this nature without being sure that all the legal forms and requirements have been complied with. This is the only way to guard against possible trouble in the future.

"I have been reading your delightful weekly, 'My Queen,' up to date, and I would like to ask you a question. I am sixteen years old, and I want to know: Is there any cure for love? I have a habit of falling in love with girls, and when I get that way I am a regular fool. I can't help it and it makes me so blue that I lose interest in everything, and it becomes a serious affair. Do you think it my nature or can I get over it.
"F. T."

You seem to be very impressionable, and you are certainly unfortunate if you fall in love with every girl you meet. A young man of your age ought not to be spending much time thinking about love affairs. Get out with the other boys, play football, baseball and learn to ride a wheel. Spend all the time you can in the open air, developing your body, and spend your evenings in study, so that when you are a few years older, you will be a big, strong man with good brains. Make the girls the last thing you think of and we are confident that, in a few months, you will find that you are cured.

"My friend and I have been going with two young ladies that we dearly love, but they do not seem to think so much of us, and that is why I drop you these lines. We want to go with them steady, and they seem as if they did not want to go with us, but we think they really do. Just give me a few points and I will bring things around all right. If they turn out the way I want them to I will let you know.
"Charles. A D."

You are not the first man who has been puzzled by a woman's aspect, and there are lots more young men who would like a "few points" on how to make their love affairs run smoothly. If you think the young ladies really care for you, in spite of their apparent indifferenee, why don't you tell them that you love them? Any woman will consider a man more seriously if he tells her frankly why he desires her acquaintanee, than if he allows her to think that he is simply killing time. A straightforward, manly stand is an advantage in love, as it is in everything else. Let us hear from you again, for we would like to know how your love affairs turn out.

"I have read 'My Queen' with great pleasure and write to ask if Bert is going to marry Marion. I think he is a fine young man and should be the happy man to claim Marion as his wife.

"GRACE K."

We agree with you that Bert is a very fine young fellow, and he certainly deserves Marion as much as any one else. You will have to read the rest of the series to find out whether he captures her, for Marion has not yet decided to marry anybody.

"I am in the same fix as a young lady is in No. 8. I am seventeen and am looking for some nice girl whom I may love.

"I should like to correspond with Miss Effie B. if she would leave her address with you.

"WILL H."

We advise you not to start looking for a girl to love. Wait until the girl comes along whom you realize you do love. She will come soon enough without your going hunting for her. It would be the best thing that could happen to you if you did not fall in love for ten years to come Young men of your age should be spending their time in study and gymnasties, and you will make a sad mistake if you allow yourself to grow sentimental.

"Having read every number of 'My Queen,' I have become greatly interested in it, especially in the columns devoted to correspondence, and I wish to ask you for a portion of your valuable advice. I think a great deal of two young ladies. One is about my own age and height, the other is three years my senior and very small. Both are nice girls and very handsome. I cannot decide which one I think the most of. Hope you can help me in making my choice. C. R N."

We do not believe that you think much of either of these girls or you would not ask an outsider to choose for you. When a man really cares for a woman he does not need a guidepost to convince him that his affections are on the right road.

"I have read so much about Marion Marlowe's good works that I want to be like her if I possibly can. I am a country girl and only came to the city three weeks ago. I think I would like to be a private detective, as no one knows me in this big city. I would like to do as much good as I can. Would you please tell me what to do?

"RUTH M. G."

We would not advise you to try to be a detective, for only a woman of wide experience is of any value in such work, as a rule. There are exceptions, of course, but you can find quite as much opportunity to do good in some other line of work. Help those whom you find to be discouraged with a cheerful word of encouragement. Help the man or woman who is down by a confident opinion that they will come out all right some day. You will meet such people almost every day of your life. Perhaps you have seen the little rhyme below which contains some very good advice:

"It's easy enough to be pleasant
When life flows along like a song,
But the woman worth while,
Is the one with a smile
When everything goes dead wrong."

"I am engaged to a certain gentleman and I am desperately in love with him, but my parents object to my marrying him. They say that I am too young for him. He is thirty-two and I am twenty, but he is wealthy, and I could not think of parting with him, for it would break my heart.

"LUCY J. B."

If you are so much in love with this gentleman, why not continue your engagement a while longer and see if your parents will not consent to it. When they realize how much you are in earnest, they may possibly reconsider their objections. If you love each other sincerely, you can easily afford to wait a while for your desires to be gratified.

"I am deeply in love with a very pretty young fellow. I am sure he also loves me. I am fourteen years old, and he is also. I have not told my parents about it. Do you think I ought to? I wear dresses up to my knees—some people think it is not right to wear them so short, but that is the way mamma makes them. I am a very pretty girl. Will you kindly give me your advice?

"BEATRICE M. K."

You are entirely too young, Beatrice, to be thinking of love. Girls and boys of fourteen should be spending their time in school, fitting themselves to be wise men and women. We think that you had better tell your parent about this little love affair and make up your mind to do exactly as they tell you They are much better judges of what is best for you than you are yourself. Your mother's ideas about dressmaking are just as much entitled to consideration as those of other people. Since she makes the dresses for you, we would advise you to be satisfied with their style.

"I here add another to your tales of woe. Please answer in your next issue of your grand series of 'My Queen.' I am keeping company with a young man with whom I am in love, but we have had a misunderstanding. He attends dances and balls without me, and I attend parties and socials without him. Now he says that by his attending dances he don't do right by me; also, that I don't do right by him by attending these. I say it makes no difference.

"ELLA B."

We cannot see that either of you committed any very serious crime in attending dances to which the other was not invited. It is simply a question of which will give you both the most happiness. If you will both be happier giving up these parties and spending the evenings at home, your lover's position is correct. Why don't you try to avoid any disagreement by introducing your lover to your friends, so that he will receive an invitation to the same places as yourself? Then you can go together.

"I am a young girl, and am greatly distressed over a young man whom I love. I have been with him for two years, and I want to ask your advice what to do to make him express his opinion on matrimony. He is also of a very jealous-minded disposition. Shall I give him up or not?
"LIZZIE M. S."

Since your love is so jealous, you might try the effect of a little indifference. Sometimes a man feels so much of a woman that he is slow in expressing his real intentions. Under such circumstances, a realization that the woman is not at his beck and call usually results in his declaring himself.

"Marion is indeed a model and it will be hard for her to choose between her lovers, for they are all so noble I think that my preference is for Dr Brookes. I want to ask some questions regarding etiquette. If a young man should come to visit the family and I should meet him at the depot, who should pay car fares? If my brother should take me to the theatre, and before time to go I should have callers, either lady or gentleman, would it be polite to go and leave them? When cheese is passed at the table, do you take a piece with your fork or your fingers?
"EDITH R."

I am glad that you find "My Queen" so interesting. To reply to your first question, we should say that as the street-car ride to your home is necessary to complete the young man's journey it is right that he should pay it. The conditions in the second question vary. If your callers are intimate friends, you can explain the circumstances and ask them to excuse you, especially if there is some other member of the family left to entertain them, but, if your friends have come a long distance it would be more courteous in you to remain at home. In all well-regulated households a special fork is provided for serving cheese If this is not done, you are justified in using your own fork, taking care to touch only the piece selected

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"I am in love with a young lady and know she is in love with me, but her mother has forbidden her to go with me because we have different religious beliefs Her father is in favor of me. Can you advise me how to overcome this difficulty? W. C. A."

"I am a Catholic young lady and am keeping company with a Protestant young gentleman. We love each other dearly and the only thing which prevents us from getting married is that we are not of the same religion What do you advise us to do? MAMIE H."

A difference in religion ought not to be allowed to alter one's affections any more than a difference in politics. To allow the differences of the religious world to enter into the family is simple folly Why do you not agree to disagree upon this subject and drop all discussion of it at once and forever?

It may not be nearly as important as you have thought it was, and it certainly should not influence one's happiness.

"Which do you think best for young married people, to start right to housekeeping or wait a few weeks until after the wedding tour before setting up housekeeping? BERTHA A. W."

This depends entirely upon individual taste and circumstances. As a rule, the bridegroom has the house all ready for his bride to enter upon the return from the wedding tour. If you prefer to wait a few weeks before going on your wedding journey, we see no reason why you should not do so

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"Oh, dear! I am in great trouble! My lover was here to call on me the other evening, and as we were all alone in the house he insisted upon putting his arm around me and kissing me. I did not know what to do so I thought I would act mad, and he got mad and said he would never call again. What shall I do? EMMA."

We do not think you will lose your lover's friendship because of resenting his caresses. On the contrary, when he thinks it over he will probably love you more than ever The girl who respects herself will be respected. No girl ever lost a true friend or a true lover by refusing to kiss him. If he does not accept your terms it will be because he does not love you truly, and the sooner you decide this question the better.

"I am nineteen years old, and I am in love with a young man and I am almost sure he loves me. When I am in his company I don't show that I love him, but I do. He goes around with a girl, and he told a friend of mine that he would rather go with me. Please tell me what to do to have him for a steady fellow, for I love him with all my heart. LAURIE."

If the young man really prefers your society and you are so much in love with him, I cannot understand why he shows any attention to any one else.

We advise you to wait quietly and let the matter develop.

"The young man that I am keeping company with sometimes takes me to see shows, and I wish to know if you think it would be all right to go to see any of them with him? I know that one which he has invited me to see is not a very nice show, but he will be mad if I don't go.
"OWITHA R."

Unfortunately, there are comparatively few plays of late that are really "nice," although, in nearly every instance, there is a moral to be drawn from the story told upon the stage.

We advise you to be very careful as to which plays you go to see, especially in the company of a young man, and if you know of one that is "not a very nice show," we would not advise you to go to it with your friend.

"I am very near eighteen years of age and I am in love with a fellow the same age We have been together for six years. None of my people like him because of a difference in religion and because he is stingy. He goes out with [illegible]

girls and he calls upon me when, you might say, he gets ready. What shall I do with him?

"S. A. G."

We advise you to let him entirely alone. There are no strong symptoms of affection in the young man's methods. A stingy man or woman is an abomination. One can be just to themselves without being stingy. No doubt, there are other young men far more worthy of your affection. You have only to wait for them.

"I am a young man eighteen years old. I have a young girl that I have been going with. She loves me, but I am afraid to propose to her.

"Now, would you kindly tell me how to propose to her, and to tell her that I love her?

"ARTHUR D."

My dear Arthur, you are entirely too young to propose to any girl. Wait until you are twenty-one and we will tell you exactly what to say and how to say it—that is, if you still desire our assistanee, which we think is very doubtful.

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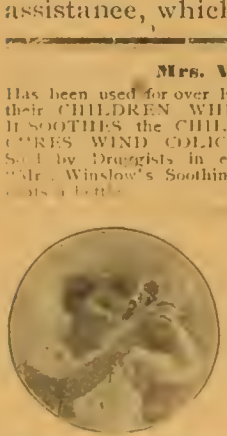

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